The Revolution by bannering

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)
Genre: Brother-Sister Relationships, F/M, I Wrote This Instead of Sleeping, I'm Bad At Tagging, I'm Very Liberal With The Use Of Italics, Mutual Pining, Slow Burn
Language: English
Characters: Claudia Henderson, Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Original Characters, Reader, Steve Harrington, Will Byers
Relationships: Steve Harrington/Reader, Steve Harrington/You
Status: In-Progress
Published: 2018-01-06
Updated: 2018-01-11
Packaged: 2022-04-03 15:20:16
Rating: General Audiences
Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Chapters: 6
Words: 13,847
Publisher: archiveofourown.org
Summary:

Dustin thinks he’s finally gonna have a quiet, normal childhood after the events with the Demodogs and Dart, until a new threat shows up at his house in the form of a 17-year old girl.

1. Part I

Author's Note:

> I cannot be held responsible for the things I do when I'm trying to avoid real shit I have to deal with, so.
>
> Hoooo boy! Okay, this is an attempt at a Harrington x Henderson!Reader fic, bc I've watched Stranger Things 2 recently and my mind hasn't been able to focus on anything else but this goddamn show.
>
> Look, guys. I don't even know. English isn't my first language, and I really need to sleep right now. I shouldn't be writing this in a language I don't quite master. I barely master my first one. Seriously. I apologize for any grammar mistakes, weird phrasing, or w/e. Feedback is accepted and motherfucking WELCOMED. Seriously. Just point that shit out for me.
>
> So, yeah. Enjoy?

There was a soft knock on the door of the Henderson household.

While Claudia was fixing them something to eat in the kitchen, Dusty had been doing his homework in the kitchen counter, or rather trying to. The new kitten, affectionately named Paws by his mother, was playing around with the pencil the kid was using to write a book essay.

"Mom, I give up. The best course of action here is to not turn in my assignment," he said, looking over to the door and getting up from the chair. His mother let out a soft laugh and shaked her head.

"Just answer the door, honey. I'll get her out of your way as soon as I'm done here."

Dustin walked over to the door and opened it, not in the least recognizing the person standing on the other side. The girl in front of

him, who had been nibbling on her bottom lip, opened her mouth to speak but seemed to have lost her voice. She stared at him dumbfounded.

“Uh, can I help you with something?”, he asked, noticing the stranger who appeared in front of him. An unruly-haired girl, she was wearing black Vans, dark jeans and a Prince t-shirt. Dustin thought she may have been 16 or 17 years old. A large duffle bag hung on her back.

“Yes,” she said, finally. “Is this the house of Claudia Henderson? I’m looking for her.”

She was looking for her. Never had a sentence been so true in her life. She was looking for Claudia. She had been looking for Claudia for months now. Months.

“Yeah, hold up,” he said softly, then turned around and screamed: “Mom! There’s someone here for you!” He took a step back and let her in, giving an exaggerated courtesy that almost made the girl laugh, if she had been in the mood for laughing.

“Dusty, honey,” They both could her distant voice getting nearer as she left the kitchen. “What have I told you about screaming inside the hou-”

Claudia let out a yelp. That’s how the girl knew she knew.

The wide-eyed middle-aged woman in front of her stopped dead in her tracks, taking shallow breaths. Dustin looked from one to the other, suddenly feeling cold. He looked at the door and realized he had not closed it, though he didn’t dare move now.

The girl cleared her throat. “Um, you’re Claudia Henderson, right…? I’m-”

“I know who you are,” she hastily said, stealing a quick glance at Dustin, who just looked confused. And that’s how the girl knew he *didn’t* know. “I… How did you…”

The question hung in the air. How did she, what? How did she know? How did she get there? How did she find out? How did she find her?

But neither of them spoke, and the kid couldn't take it anymore. Here comes this person, this *strange-looking girl*, who out of nowhere shows up at *his* house and causes such a reaction on *his* mother. After everything that happened in the past year, Dustin knew now how to recognize a threat. Not that he wasn't curious, but the last time he had been curious, he had befriended the very definition of a threat, a *cat-eating* definition of a threat. Standing in front of him, in his living room there was another threat.

"Mom, what's going on?," he asked, approaching her and giving her a side hug, pressing her arm ever so slightly. He gave the girl a threatening look. "Who is this girl? Do you want her to leave? I can kick her out." He then let go of Claudia and made his way to the girl. "Ok, I don't know who you are but you have to go right now. I may not look intimidating, but I have fought things much worse than you, so I think I should be-"

"Kid," the young girl interrupted him lifting her hand, trying to look at him softly. She could understand where he was coming from. "It's fine. I'll leave." She looked at Claudia, who was still seemingly frozen, her feet pratically glued to the end of the orange carpet. The girl opened her mouth to say something, *anything*, but nothing came out, so she just sighed and turned around. When she reached the door and placed her hand on the knob, thinking she would shut it behind her, she heard this plea, barely above a whisper.

"Wait." Claudia had said. The young girl witnessed the woman take a deep breath and face her son. "Dustin, honey" she paused, closing her eyes. "She is your sister."

2. Part II

It's not like Dustin hadn't thought about it.

In the List of Things Dustin Henderson Had Dreamt About, having a sibling was very high up, along with holding the high score in all of the games in the arcade (that would prove to be a little more difficult since Max had moved to Hawkins) and piloting the actual Millennium Falcon (downright impossible, unless he settled for *pretending* to ride the *model* designed for the movie in a studio somewhere in Hollywood). But having a sibling, yeah. Not too hard, right?

He never really wanted a father. Her mum worked hard for them, was a loving parent and just the right amount of spacey, which gave him some freedom but did not make him feel overlooked. That came in handy when the events of Demodogs took place not long ago. And honestly, he had met Mike's dad, so he was not impressed. Sure, Lucas' father was a nice person, but Will's was just the absolute worst. No, no reason for a kid like Dustin to search for a father figure.

But a sibling, that was something else. He adored Nancy and thought it might be cool to have an older sibling like her, even with all the bickering that went on between Mike and her. And anyways, he could appreciate the bickering. Hell, he *wanted* it. Okay, maybe not a sister, since Nancy was always yelling at Mike to stay out of her room and Erica kept calling Lucas a nerd and stealing his action figures to play with her dolls. She made them kiss, for Christ's sake. He-Man was not a kisser.

But a brother, yes. Definitely. Will had a great relationship with his big brother, who adored him and went out of his way to make the kid feel good about himself. Maybe Dustin's brother would have done the same. Maybe Dustin's brother would have watched sci-fi movies with him, helped him during a particularly extensive Dungeons & Dragons campaign, put on some nice tunes in the car while they drove to school together.

He had pictured a cool, older brother. He had definitely not pictured the girl sitting on the reclining chair in front of him, nervously tapping her fingers on the duffle bag sitting atop her lap.

“A SISTER?!” Lucas yelled.

The kids were on the Wheeler’s basement, where they reconvened after a very urgent message from Dustin, who kept calling “Code brown! Code brown!” on the walkie-talkie. Code brown wasn’t as bad as code red, but it still meant “things were turning to shit”, according to him.

Dustin closed his eyes, turned to Lucas exasperated and opened them, their faces a few inches apart. “Buddy, you don’t have to yell. I’m right here.” Lucas rolled his eyes.

“That’s the weirdest thing ever.”

“Dude, *that’s* the weirdest thing ever?? We fought a Demogorgon last year, his army of Demo-dogs this year, El here can move and break things with her mind –her *mind*, Lucas–, Will was taken to *another dimension* and was possessed by a freaking monster, I adopted a goddamn swamp monster, whose face *opened up* and he *ate* my cat – and *that’s* the weirdest thing ever?”

“...Yeah.”

“Ugh, I know right?,” Dustin said, looking defeated and falling on the couch behind him.

He would be lying if he said he wasn’t appreciating the attention, especially from Max. It’s not that he didn’t know Lucas and her had kissed or whatever, but he still had a crush on her and it made him feel nice that she was invested in his story as much as everyone else. ‘Don’t care,’ he thought, hearing Steve’s voice in his mind. ‘She’s just gonna break your heart and you’re too young for that shit.’

“Half-sister,” she corrected, looking at Lucas. Everyone looked at her with a puzzled face. “She’s not his sister, she’s his half-sister. There’s a difference.”

Mike ignored her and rolled his eyes. “So, now what? Is she gonna live with you? What does she want? Who is she?”

---–

“Here it is...” Claudia lingered as she extended the girl a glass of water.

“(Y/N).”

“(Y/N),” Claudia repeated, sitting down on the couch next to Dustin.

The girl had realized two things: one was that she hadn’t introduced herself, which made sense since her mind was going a million miles per hour, anxiety through the roof as it had been for months. And two, was that that was the very first time she heard her mother say her name. Her mother. Who didn’t even know her name. That’s weird, right? Parents are supposed to know their kids’ names. But then again, (Y/N)’s life had always been weird.

It sounded nice. Until Dustin repeated, in a slightly disgusted voice.

Her mother looked at him, ready to reprimand him, but she backtracked soon enough. This was a shitty situation and he was just a child. The best course of action here, and especially with a kid like Dustin, would be to explain everything thoroughly. Claudia looked at (Y/N), then at her son, turning to him on the sofa. The young girl couldn’t wait a second longer, knowing that she would listen to the story of her own life told through another perspective.

“I... Here’s what happened.” She took a deep breath. “It was a mistake, honey. Your father travelled around a lot for work, he was rarely ever here, even in the beginning of our marriage. I was always alone in this house, and I just really needed to talk someone. This man, he was really sweet and caring. So I made a mistake.”

(Y/N) looked down at her hands. So she was a mistake. ‘Nice, very nice,’ she thought sarcastically. (Y/N) took a deep breath and remembered the words: “Sarcasm is the last refuge of the weak mind”. Well, that’s what she was, right? Weak.

Dustin felt weird. He had never met his father, and his mother rarely talked about him, if ever. This felt like an important moment for him, as he might finally get some answers.

Claudia kept going.

“I panicked. This was around the time your dad had been in Canada for months, so he would’ve known and I don’t know what he would’ve had done if he had found out. I went through hell in those nine months, trying to hide the pregnancy whenever he came home, which was only for a few days at a time. Your Aunt Sylvia helped me. She helped me conceal my pregnancy and gave up the baby as soon as she was born,” she said, throwing the girl a quick glance.

‘I don’t know what he would’ve had done if he had found out.’

That sentence stuck to Dustin’s mind like glue.

“When I had told David, this other man, what was going on, I didn’t think he would be happy, but he was. He was ecstatic. He was in love with me and had always wanted a child. Maybe in his mind, being pregnant with his kid would force me to leave your dad, but I couldn’t. Your aunt and I were convinced that David would’ve made things more complicated, so I lied to him. I told him I had had an abortion. That’s the name of your father, (Y/N). David-”

“I know.” she answered flatly. “I found out he didn’t knew I existed the hard way.”

At her sudden unpleasantness, Claudia looked down at her lap, sorrow and sadness taking over her features. (Y/N) felt Dustin’s eyes on her and he looked pissed.

Damn, (Y/N) had every right to be rude. She had driven all the way to her father’s farm in the middle of nowhere only to have the door slammed on her face. It took *weeks* until he finally accepted she wasn’t lying, or looking for money, or going crazy.

But for some reason, having that curly-haired boy angry at her made her feel bad for Claudia.

“When I reached out to him, he was actually... relieved? When he finally realized that I wasn’t lying, I mean.” This was the most (Y/N) had talked. “As much as he’s upset that you lied to him, which he *is*, he’s more happy that you didn’t go through with the... procedure.”

The look on Claudia's eyes were indecipherable. (Y/N) thought she saw a spark of hope, a tiny slither of light upon the notion that a man she once loved didn't really hate her. Her mother offered her a small smile, and that seemed to have satisfied Dustin.

There was a silence, the wheels turning for everyone as they tried to understand everything that had happened.

Dustin had to face the fact that his father hadn't been a very nice person, which he had known to some extent. And the fact that his mother was a flawed woman, which was a little harder to comprehend.

"(Y/N), I'm sorry. You got caught up in this mess and you're only- God, you're 17-years old, aren't you? You're just a kid. How did you find me? How did you end up here?"

"I don't know. I guess she's looking for answers, or some dumb shit? She's staying at this hotel, I think. She's not gonna live with us. And she's just a boring, dumb teenager, who cares." Dustin turned his attention to the top of the stairs, where someone had cleared their throat. Steve was standing there, hands on his hips, an annoyed look on his face.

"I regret ever giving you my number."

"Where the fuck have you been?" Dustin complained.

"Uh, I was living my life? What's so urgent, dipshit?"

"The new member of the Henderson family." Lucas snickered and Dustin glared at him.

"Yeah, Paws, right? I met that stupid cat, he did this." Steve pointed to a scratch in his left hand, while he approached the gang. "He's hardly a new member, and this does *not* constitute an emergency, butthead."

"No. Dustin's sister," El said.

“Half-sister,” Max corrected one more time.

“Oh my God, who cares?” Mike yelled, glaring at the new girl. Lucas came to her defense, Max complained that Mike was still being an asshole, Jane stared at them, confused, and Will just kept rolling his eyes, telling everyone to calm down because none of that was important at the moment. While the heated argument was going on, Steve sat down next to Dustin.

“What, the, hell, Dustin.”

“My mom had a daughter before she had me, and I just found out today because the fucking girl showed up at my house,” he said, annoyed. “See, Steve?! That’s what you get for being late. I specifically called a code brown and you took too fucking long to get here and now-”

“Don’t get fresh with me, dumbass.” Steve interrupted. He rubbed his chin and ran a hand through his hair. “Is this for real? Do you want a ride home? Do you want to talk about it?”

Dustin looked at the screaming gang and then at Steve. He felt tired all of a sudden and just wanted to go home. Perhaps Steve would help him, as he had helped the last time. His advices and words of encouragement had been really cool the last time, maybe he would be able to help Dustin one more time.

“Yeah, sure.” They both stood up.

“Also, I’m sorry. This *definitely* constitutes an emergency.”

3. Part III

Steve decided very early on he would keep an eye on this girl. Nothing weird or anything, but he had come to appreciate Dustin, which he did not expect at all. He was a nice kid, a little lost and too much of a nerd for his own good, but still. Nice. And when Dustin was acting all weird at the diner when he finished telling the story, even after Steve had bought him chocolate milkshake and fries, the older boy's protective instincts kicked in.

"That. Is. Weird."

"No shit, Steve."

"Like weird, weird."

"Yeah."

"I'm sorry? I don't know what to tell you. That's a shitty situation," he said, grabbing a handful of the young boy's fries and stuffing them in his mouth. Partly because he was hungry, also partly because he wanted an excuse not to speak. He didn't know what to say. "And you just, left them there?"

"I guess they have a lot of stuff to talk about. All I know is my mom handed me a bunch of quarters and told me to go to the arcade." Dustin shook his bag, the coins clinking as they banged against each other. He took a few fries, dunked them in the milkshake and said with a mouthful: "But–and I never thought I'd say this, but I couldn't care less about Dig-Dug right now."

Steve looked disgusted at the boy's eating habits but chuckled lightly.

They continued to eat in silence for a while until the older boy spoke.

"I can't believe you let me pay for you when you have a bag filled with money. You asshat."

For the first time that day, Dustin laughed out loud.

‘What are you waiting for?’

(Y/N) sat at the stairs in front of the house, trying to take deep breaths.

“Oh, here you are,” she heard Claudia say. “I thought you had left, I turned around and-”

“I just needed to breathe,” she interrupted. “I couldn’t do that inside this house.”

Claudia stayed silent. They sat in the stairs without a word. The long, exhausting conversation they had had inside stayed in the distant past until Paws made his out to the girl and climbed on her lap. (Y/N) stroke his face as he took tiny bites out of her hand. She gave him a tiny smile.

“Do you like cats?,” her mother asked.

“Yeah. When I was about 5, I got sent to this family and they had a bunch of pets. Like, dogs, cats, birds, even a piglet. My favorite ones were the cats.” Claudia smiled at the confession, her heart hurting slightly at the thought of this child getting shipped to a family of strangers.

“I love cats. We used to have another cat, Mews was her name, but she disappeared a few months ago. I guess she ran away. Dustin was actually the one who picked out Paws at the shelter,” the older woman said, and (Y/N) just hummed in agreement. “He’s a good kid.”

“Yeah, I can tell.” She forced a smile. (Y/N) didn’t want to think about it too hard. Of course he was a good kid. He had his mother, she had been there for him. What did (Y/N) have to show for herself? Nothing. She got nothing. “So,” She tried drowning out the thoughts. “I’m feeling better already. I think it’s the cat’s effect.” She heard a light chuckle.

“Are you sure you don’t want to stay? We have a spare bedroom...”

“I’m sure. Look, Claudia.” (Y/N) turned to the older woman, the cat jumping out of her lap. She tried to ignore to look of pain in her face.

“I know I’ve said this, but I don’t want anything from you. I’m not interested in-”

“I know, sweetie.” At that word, **sweetie**, (Y/N) almost cried.

“I don’t want to impose. And uh, Dustin might be uncomfortable, as I’m sure you didn’t run by your offer through him, so... It’s fine. It’s a nice enough motel. I’ve slept in worst places.” Now it was Claudia’s turn to almost cry.

“Let me at least pack you something to eat. You stay there,” she said, getting up and walking to the kitchen, screaming now so that the girl could hear her. “And I’ll make you a PB and J, okay?”

The girl hummed a silent okay and waited in the stairs, not missing the very domestic thing that was waiting fo her mother to fix her a sandwich. While she waited in the stairs, an expensive car pulled up on the driveway. Inside, sat her half-brother and an older boy, who was maybe her age. She hadn’t seen him before, but after the extensive research she had done on her family, she knew he wasn’t a part of it.

Dustin looked at her through the glass and said something to the guy.

(Y/N) hated this. She always hated when people judged her, and that has gotten her into trouble a couple of times already. The feelings of inadequacy and sorrow were quickly replaced by annoyance and just downright anger. She knew he’d judge her, that they would all look at her and conjure this image of her in their head that she had no control of. And it infuriated her. They didn’t *know* her, they didn’t know *anything*.

She stood up as soon as Dustin left the car and braced herself for whatever he was gonna throw her way, but he just walked right past her and into his house, not once acknowledging her. (Y/N) looked at the door after he slammed it and took a deep breath, trying to control her anger. That is until she felt a set of eyes on her, practically burning a hole on her neck.

“Can I help you with something?,” she said through gritted teeth, as she turned around, and the crazy-haired boy who stood leaning

against the car jumped slightly, not expecting her rashness. But he just stared at her, arms crossed in front of him. Steve had promised himself he would case this new girl out, and that's what he was doing.

(Y/N) hated this. She took another breath and kept thinking of another one of her mantras: 'Violence does, in truth, recoil upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the pit which he digs for another.' She picked up her duffle bag, put it over her shoulder and walked to the street, her feet making their way to the hotel she had been staying. She knew the way by now. That hadn't been the first time she'd gone to the Henderson house, it was just the first time she'd actually knocked on the door.

She could still feel his eyes on her, and she couldn't control it. She couldn't control how he would perceive her, how people would look at her, and that truly upset her. She was a good person. Right? But if she couldn't make people see that, if she couldn't make them realize she was nice, then she might as well act like they expected her to. So she left, letting go of the sandwich, trying to ignore the aching feeling in her chest that she just passed up the opportunity to have someone do something nice for her for once.

(Y/N) went through her regular routine as soon as she got in her room. She put her bag on top of the bed, took everything out and put them in their original places. The folded clothes went on the dresser, the toiletries were nicely arranged on the bathroom sink, and the books were placed on the bedside table, sticking out of each one a photograph marking a page.

That was all she had, her entire life displayed across a dirty, run down motel room. That was all she had to show for herself. Seventeen years worth of memories could fit in a military-style bag that she carried around because she knew better. She wouldn't leave her entire life on a crappy motel room.

(Y/N) had been sent to way too many houses to know that that was nothing. She had seen in many of her "sisters" bedrooms an inordinate amount of memorabilia. Childhood toys, birthday and

Christmas cards, old drawings that once hung in the refrigerator.

She tried ignoring the memory of Dustin's room of when Claudia had given her the house tour. He had *so many toys*, posters on the wall, colorful lights. And a terrarium. (Y/N) loved turtles, they were one of her favorite animals and she couldn't help but wonder what would've happened if she hadn't been given away. 'Given away, like an animal, like a gift people didn't like, like trash', she thought.

(Y/N) would have her own room, filled with books from end to end. She would have stuffed animals she had had as a kid, but wasn't ready yet to give away. She would keep her old assignments and homework on a box or a cool wooden chest that would sit on the foot of her bed. She would get the same lights from Dustin's room, and they would both take care of Paws and Yertle together. She would be annoyed at him if he ever went into her room without asking, but the thought of that didn't make her angry. She wanted to be annoyed at a little brother for not respecting boundaries. She wanted boundaries in the first place, because that would mean she had a space to call her own.

"Here it is...," Claudia began, a sandwich wrapped in plastic wrap in her hand. She stopped when she couldn't see the girl. "Oh, hi, Steve. Did you see my-uh, a girl walk by here?"

Steve nodded. "Hi, Mrs. Henderson. I did, she just left."

He felt bad. The defeated look on her face, the sudden arm drop. She kept looking out to the streets, hoping to maybe see a glimpse of her, even though she knew she wouldn't. Steve watched as she gulped, trying to keep her emotions at bay, and went back into the house in a haste, not before he caught a few tears prickling in her eyes, even in the distance.

Dusty, who had followed his mother, gave him a thumbs up. "Nice, buddy. Did you scare her off?"

"What? Of course not," he said as he watched the younger boy approach him. "Maybe. I didn't say anything, though. She literally

just got up and left."

"Hopefully forever."

"Is it?"

"What?," Dustin asked, leaning against the car in the same manner as Steve's.

"Hopefully."

"Uh, yeah. Of course."

"I don't know, man," Steve contended. "Your mum doesn't seem to think so."

The young boy scoffed.

"Dustin, look. I don't really know what advice to give you because I've never been in the same situation as you. Girl problems, sure, I'm your guy. But this... I'm afraid I can't help you with that, buddy. But here's a thing I learned in the past few months. Communication is very important." He rubbed his neck, still unsure, and paused. "Maybe think about what's like for your mum. Ask her what she's feeling. Talk to her. Thinking you know what's on the other person's mind and acting according to that, sheesh. That's no way to live life. Trust me. *That* I know."

Dustin immediately opened his mouth to argue with his friend, but gave up. He was sort of right, the boy still needed to talk to his mum. But it felt like a betrayal of sorts. Like Dustin had been wrong for wishing this girl just went away and never came back.

"I thought you were on my side," he whispered, a sting in his voice.

"Buddy..." Steve lamented, but Dustin went inside his house, leaving the older boy feeling defeated and frustrated.

—

She took one of the books, and old copy of Some Trees, by John Ashbery, and read the same passage she read everytime she thought

about leaving, about being left, about the ever-growing nature of movement that had always been a central of part of (Y/N)'s life.

"What more is there to do, except stay? And that we cannot do."

4. Part IV

It was actually surprising he'd recognized her voice.

Steve had only heard her once the day before, when she'd been rude to him for no reason. Now, she was being all polite and sweet, and it sounded radically different, like it was another person. It sounded *nice*.

"Just 2 dollars? It's in near mint condition," (Y/N) pleaded. She was too wrapped up in the conversation with Mr. Watkins to even notice Steve walking in the bookstore. He quickly hid behind one of the shelves of used books.

This hadn't been on purpose. He promised himself he'd keep an eye on her, but he wasn't stalking the girl. Steve was just trying to make amends with Dustin and he thought buying him a new edition of The Three Musketeers had been a good idea, seeing as the boy's book was all torn up and falling apart. Not to mention a bit ironic, sure.

Yeah. Steve Harrington was going *soft*.

But he didn't have a choice, really. He felt bad. He thought about calling the Henderson house when he got home that day, but didn't want to intrude or get in the way of anything that might be happening that day, especially if Dustin stopped being such a hard head and actually took the older boy's advice. Steve had even turned on the walkie-talkie the kid gifted to him right after the events with the Demo-dogs (because "you're one of us now, buddy. Don't even try to deny that."), but not a sound. Not only was Dustin not saying anything, which was rare and the whole reason Steve would groan loudly and leave the walkie off most of the time, he was actually ignoring the other boy's attempt to contact him on their channel. (Yes, they had their own channel.)

So... Drastic measures, right? The first thing he did the next day was get on his car and go to the store. Yeah. *Soft*.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart. That's the price I would pay you for this book," Mr. Watkins, the 65-year old owner of the bookstore, lamented, a

sympathetic look on his face. "Now, if your offer still stands, I'm sure we could work something out. You would help me here for a while, organize this *mess*, as you so kindly pointed out to me the other day-" At that, (Y/N) let out a hearty laugh. Yeah, Steve thought, *definitely* nice. "And you can read all the books you want. When you decide to leave, I can trade you, how about that? The books in that bag of yours for a few from the store."

"And you'd still pay me, right?" Her voice had been rough the day before, now it was all soft edges, a nice cadence. "I don't mean to be an ass, but I very much need the money."

Mr. Watkins laughed. "Of course, I'd pay you. I can't believe I'm gonna be paying the *ass* who showed up here every day for almost a week, pointing out all the flaws in my shop and how she would help me fix them. But don't worry, I'm gonna pay you."

(Y/N) laughed again. She was at ease, that much Steve could tell. "Thank you, Mr. Watkins." A thought crossed her mind. "Uh, you know, if you don't want me working here, it's fine. I hear the movie theater is looking for a new employee, and-"

"Save it, kid. It's done." He gave her a smile. "You showed up every day for the past seven days, reading everything you could get your hands on until closing time. I think you might be a good asset."

She gave him a shy smile, and he pointed out to the room in the back, telling her where to keep her stuff. (Y/N) went inside for a moment and came back, starting to organize the new arrivals at the shelves.

Steve took a deep breath and planned on hiding out at least until she went back inside again. But then, Mr. Watkins voice resonated throughout the bookstore.

"Anything I can help you with, young man?" Steve winced. He got out of his not-so-great hiding spot and went over to the counter where the old man was, not missing the undecipherable look on (Y/N)'s face he caught with the corner of his eyes.

"Uh, yeah. I'm looking for The Three Musketeers."

"Ah, Alexandre Dumas' magnum opus. Yes, yes. A tale about d'Artagnan as he tries to join the Musketeers of the Guard. A fine novel, young man. You know, he wrote that book when he was 42-years old, and it's largely based on the author's close experience with the military, since his father had been a well-known General in France's Republican army..." He went on. Steve was trying to concentrate on what the man was saying, but he was way too aware of the fact that the girl had disappeared right after she saw him. But it didn't take too long for her to show up again.

"Here, Mr. Watkins. The book he was searching for."(Y/N) smiled at the man, and scowled at Steve, keeping her eyes focused on him. Steve was cursing himself in his mind.

"Ah, thank you, (Y/N)."

(Y/N). In all of the talks he had with Dustin, he'd never thought to ask her name, and the boy certainly didn't use it. He kept calling her *the girl*. (Y/N).

Steve was pulled away from his thoughts by the old man's voice, who was telling him his total and wrapping up the book. Steve payed for it, took the bag and gave (Y/N) a look. It couldn't have been worse than the look she was giving *him*. That's not what he wanted. He wanted to say *Let's talk*. He wanted to convey a *Don't hate me* look. For some reason. What did he have to say? What did he want to say? He just felt like he *had* to talk to the girl. Damn you, Dustin.

Steve went outside and leaned against the cool glass of the bookstore, hoping she would understand him, waiting for her to follow his lead. As soon as he picked up a cigarette, the door opened.

"What. The. Fuck. Are you following me?," (Y/N) whisper-yelled at him. He turned and saw Mr. Watkins eyeing them curiously. He wondered what she'd said to him before going out.

"Don't flatter yourself, okay? I didn't know you'd be here, I'm just buying something for Dustin." He didn't mean to bite back, really. But he got defensive, he was tired from all the emotional stuff from yesterday between Dustin and his mum, and Dustin and him, and this girl who had just shown up, who gave her the right?, and why did

she have this intensity in her eyes?, it made it very hard for Steve to even *think* about looking away.

At the mention of the boy, her body tensed, but her facial features softened. Steve didn't have a choice. He had to notice the way her eyes dropped down, the way she rubbed her hands on each other, how she bit her lower lip.

"Oh. Right. Okay, then." She turned her back to him and Steve's mind went into overdrive.

"I could help you out," he practically yelled. He winced at how loud he'd been.

(Y/N) turned around. "What?"

"I... Uh, I'm...," Steve sighed. "Can you meet me at the diner right around the corner? Say, noon? I... I wanna help."

She stared at him, suspiciously. 'This is a mess. What are you doing?', she thought. What does he have to gain? Why is he doing this? He's just a random dude who was giving Dustin a ride, why on Earth would he want to talk to her? What would he have to say? Would he tell her to leave them alone? Leave Claudia and Dustin be and just go away? That wouldn't be the first time someone would forcefully suggest her that.

Steve waited and braced himself. For her to say no, to tell him to go fuck himself, to flip him off. Maybe what Dustin needed wasn't a book, maybe what Dustin needed was to sit down and talk to her, find out more about her, just get to know her. Maybe that would be a better gift to repair his friendship with the boy, but in order to do that, first Steve needed to help her. He was so sure she wouldn't take his offer, she would just ignore him.

His heart broke a little when in a rare moment of vulnerability, she just whispered: "Why?"

It was 12:15 and there was no sign of her.

‘It’s only been fifteen minutes, man,’ he thought, trying to calm himself down, but he was wreck. Steve was a doer, not a talker. He would try ease into things, but maybe he couldn’t fix this, maybe this was something that couldn’t be fixed at all. But he owed to Dustin to at least try and help out his friend. Which was who he was doing this for. He was certainly not doing this for the unruly-haired girl, crossing the streets absentmindedly, in an oversized sweater, mom jeans and Converse sneakers. Definitely not for the girl who was so quick to lower her eyes at a stranger while he held the door open for her, a quiet thank you leaving her lips. No, not for this girl who looked at him with daggers in her eyes, a hard exterior taking over her. The vulnerability and softness were gone.

(Y/N) sat down in front of Steve and stared at him.

Boy, this was gonna be tough.

“So... You, um... We should probably get something to eat.” The waitress came to their table, took their order and left. Steve noticed she was always polite, to everyone but him apparently. “Uh. Congrats on getting a job.”

‘What? Why the fuck would you say that? Moron.’

“It’s Steve, right?,” she snapped, giving him an exasperated sigh. He couldn’t blame her now. “What’s in this for you? Why are you even in this? Nothing about this concerns you.”

So no easing into things, right?

“It does, in a way.” She lift her eyebrows, and he explained. “Dustin is a good friend of mine.”

“Why are you hanging out with middle schoolers?”

He rubbed his neck. “It’s... complicated.”

“Look, if you don’t wanna tell me, it’s fine-“

“I don’t.” Steve was quick to add. He almost missed the tiny lift of the corner of her lips.

“But isn’t you telling me things the whole point of this? Don’t you wanna help me with Dustin?” Something Steve did notice. Anytime Dustin was brought up, she visibly changed, her posture, her features, everything. As if dealing with everything else, absent parents and being left behind was nothing compared to having a half-brother.

“I was hoping *you* would tell *me* things.”

“And why would I do that? I don’t know you.”

“Because I’m your best tool to get close to Dustin.”

“Well, you’re a tool. I’ll give you that.”

Steve quirked his brows and there was a silence. (Y/N) thought maybe she’d crossed a line. Not that she cared, because she *didn’t*. But her thoughts were interrupted by a loud laugh coming from the boy in front of her.

“That was good. Funny.”

She tried not to blush or feel proud for having made him laugh. (Y/N) rubbed her eyes in hopes that that would at least help her get her shit together. Their food arrived and the first thing (Y/N) did was take a handful of fries and dunk them on the chocolate milkshake she’d ordered. At that, Steve grinned.

“What?” she asked.

“Nothing. I just-I have a feeling you and Dustin are gonna get along just fine.”

5. Part V

"So... What do you like to do?," Dustin asked.

He'd promised both his mom and Steve that he would be polite to (Y/N). And during the dinner the Henderson family had at his house, Dustin complied. Which involved him not saying a lot, because he knew his first reflex was to be mean to her. Or at least a little snappy. Anyways, he obeyed and mostly just watched as his mom and this girl talked, or rather as his mom nervously filled up the space with empty words and the girl just nodded occasionally and spoke a little.

But now Dustin, (Y/N), and Steve were in Steve's car, going to the diner for dessert.

This had been Steve's idea.

'She looks really nice when she is not being rude to me,' Steve thought. 'Shit.'

(Y/N) was trying to catch her breath. The boy had been telling her stories about Dustin and his friends, and most of them were funny. He refrained from letting her in on any of the events of the Demogorgon and Dart, because why would he tell anyone about that? So he just stuck to the stories about the Party, about their love of Dungeons and Dragons, about his adventures in babysitting them.

"Okay," she said, still giggling a bit. "I guess I understand why you're hanging out with middle schoolers, then."

(Y/N) stopped. She noticed she'd been laughing too hard and tried to compose herself, so she cleared her throat and looked around for the waitress to ask for more coffee. Steve noticed that, but made no attempt to point it out. He knew it would only make her mad.

"So... What did she say when you called her?"

At one point during their lunch, the girl had phoned Claudia to schedule dinner. A family dinner.

(Y/N) shrugged her shoulders. “She immediately said yes.” The girl laughed, bitterly. She cleared her throat one more time. “But I told her she needed to talk to Dustin first. So she’s gonna ask him when he comes back from... Matt’s house?”

“Mike.”

“Mike, yeah.”

Steve sat upright and was about to say something when the waitress arrived, bringing (Y/N) more coffee. He declined.

“You were gonna say…,” she looked at him expectantly.

What was he gonna say? He watched her as she blew her coffee, a futile attempt at making it slightly less hot. She took a sip and made a low, hissing noise when the drink burned her tongue, furrowing her brows slightly. (Y/N) looked at him again. He had been staring this whole time without realizing it.

“Right, uh. Yeah. What I was gonna say was…,” Steve began explaining himself, buying some time. He had forgotten what he was gonna say. “Maybe, after the dinner with the three of you -I doubt he’s gonna say no, to be honest. He’s way too curious to say no- I could pick you guys up and we could come here?” 'What? That was a stupid idea.'

“Why?,” (Y/N) asked, her forehead wrinkling.

“Uh, it might be easier for him to accept you… Uh, away from his mom? I don’t know if this makes sense but, I feel like seeing you with Mrs. Henderson would be tough on him, like you’re trying to steal her or something.”

“I’m not trying to steal her.”

“I know that. And you know that. But he’s just a kid. A very smart, too-smart-for-his-own-good kid. But a kid. Plus, I can serve as a buffer, y’know? Help you out. After the family dinner, of course.” Steve scratched his head and (Y/N) noticed that that was a nervous tick. She couldn’t help but be a little endeared by that. Not a lot, no. Just a little.

“Huh. Yeah, I guess. You might have a point here,” she said, taking a sip

of this coffee. It wasn't so hot now. "You are more insightful than you look." (Y/N) gave him a little smile, partially hidden by the ceramic mug she held in front of her lips.

"Wow. A backhanded compliment." Steve smirked, folding his arms in front of him. "That was the nicest thing you've said to me."

(Y/N) snorted and Steve just thought: "Fuck."

"What do you mean?," she asked from the back of the car. Dustin had called shotgun as soon as they went outside, which won him a stern look from Steve. The older boy was about to complain when (Y/N) said it was no problem.

"Ugh, for fun. Like, what do you like to do or whatever? Do you not know English?" Dustin huffed, crossing his arms and staring at the streets passing by.

"Hey, watch it." Steve gave him another stern look from the corner of his eyes.

"I never wanted to do this, Harrington. Okay? You were the one who was like, 'Meh, she is cool. Your mother would appreciate if you were nice to her.'" The younger boy used a high-pitched voice pretending he was Steve, and it made (Y/N) snort from the back. She was trying not to think about *what* he was saying, rather *how* he was saying it. "Practically *begging* me-"

"Dustin…"

It was quiet for a while.

"I like listening to music. The Clash, David Bowie. Prince and The Revolution is my favorite of all time, and Purple Rain was basically all I heard when I left Jacksonville and came to Hawkins. I own a t-shirt from a concert I went to a while back and it's basically my uniform. Uh, what else? I love reading, books have saved my life more times than I can count. Once literally, when I struck a boy in the head with a Moby Dick copy." Dustin snorted quietly and coughed, pretending he hadn't laughed at the story. (Y/N) noticed it

and smirked, proudly, but said nothing. "I have a soft spot for adventure novels, like The Three Musketeers…" She trailed off and caught the little smile on Steve's face. "Also, Stephen King! Carrie and The Shining have kept me up at night quite a lot."

(Y/N) had never been so hell bent on making someone like her, that was why she was being so honest. It bothered her a bit, she felt too vulnerable. But it was worth it, she guessed, if it made the too-smart-for-his-own-good kid like her or at least accept her existence. What she didn't expect was that Steve would be hanging on to her every word.

"Oh, and I also play video games. A lot. I had a real problem as a kid, you couldn't tear me away from the arcade if you wanted to. Like, Dig-Dug, Galaga, Dragon's Lair..."

Dustin's eyes grew excited at her every word, fitting the girl behind him in the description of the older brother he had always dreamt of. She didn't miss it, his reaction. She could see it from the side of his face. (Y/N) was trying really hard not to smirk, seeing as she might actually be winning him over. She made a mental note to thank Steve.

"I love those video games! I used to have the high score for Dig-Dug at The Palace, y'know? The arcade in town. Anyways, that was until this girl Max…" Dustin had begun talking with an excitement in his voice but it died down the more he spoke. The boy noticed he was sounding too nice, and immediately backtracked. He became serious all of a sudden and started messing around with his hands. "Oh. I see. Video games, yeah. Whatever."

Steve first noticed it when they parted ways, him insisting on walking her back to the bookstore when her lunch break was over. (Y/N) turned to him when they reached it and waved a tiny goodbye, her voice low. She walked in and he was left staring at her through the clear glass of the storefront. The unruly-haired girl struck up a conversation with the owner as she took some books from a box and began placing them in their respective shelves.

He felt odd. There was this feeling inside of him. Steve couldn't quite pinpoint where it was coming from, or what it was in fact, but he knew that in order to get to the bottom of that feeling, he'd have to keep talking to her, helping her out. It was almost this restlessness. Yeah, restlessness. That was what he felt whenever he looked at (Y/N). He couldn't stand still. Nor could his heart.

She smirked again. "Why do you ask?" There was a long pause.

"I'm asking because the whole point of this is us getting to know each other, right?" Dustin snapped, looking behind at her as Steve hit the breaks harder than he had to. The three lurched forward, realizing they had reached the diner. "Harrington, what the hell?"

"(Y/N), um. Do you wanna maybe go inside and order for us?"

"I don't know what you guys want." She cocked her brows.

"Or maybe just order for yourself, we'll be right out."

"I'm not that hungry, we just ate a bunch of…" She stopped when she saw Steve fake-smile at her. "Um, sure." as she made her way out of his car, mumbling how weird he was acting.

As soon as she slammed the door, he turned to the younger boy. "What are you doing, Dustin?"

The boy sighed and mumbled, almost inaudibly: "I don't wanna be here."

"Why not? She *is* pretty cool, and you seemed really excited to have things in common with her." He huffed. "Look, no one's expecting you to embrace her right away or to invite her to the next campaign at Mike's, or something. Just talk to her like a normal person. You two have a lot in common. Who knows?"

Dustin scoffed, but he knew. He was starting to warm up to her. She had been nice to his mom, and helped out with the dishes at the awkward dinner and now was willing to stand there while Dustin snapped at her. The more Dustin discussed it with Will and El, who

might have the closest experience to (Y/N)'s, the more he realized that *maybe* being given away as a baby was a shitty thing to have happened to someone, and that *perhaps* she wasn't looking for anything except her family. And now, after what she'd said in the car, he wanted to talk to her about her high scores, about the books she had been reading, whether she liked science her not (he had a feeling she did), ask her to show him some cool music, tips on how to impress a girl. Everything. But there was a part of him holding him back, the part of him that answered the door a few days ago and was confused to find out that he had a half-sister. The part of him that was terrified that everything was about to change, when in reality everything *had* changed.

It took him a few seconds, but Dustin finally took a long breath. "Is she really cool?"

"Yeah. I haven't spent a lot of time with her, but yeah. She's cool," Steve said, staring out the window of his car and finding (Y/N) inside the diner, sitting on the booth they had sat and fiddling with her thumb. There it was again. That restlessness.

"I have a proposition for you. Over." Steve let go of the walkie button and waited. Dustin was too curious, at some point he was going to say something. It took a couple of minutes, time the boy probably spent cursing himself and pacing in his room, but eventually, there was the sound of a click on the other end.

"Harrington, I swear to God…"

Steve smirked. "You didn't say over. Over."

"Fucking asshole... Over."

"Do you wanna hear it or not? Over."

A moment of silence. "…Yes." Steve waited on the other end. "Son of a bitch! Over!"

It was hard to say something when Steve kept chuckling. "You should say yes to the dinner. Over."

“Why the fuck would I do that? Over.” Dustin sighed.

“Because after, the three of us can go to the diner and then you and the girl *can talk without your mom. You should get to know her before you start hating her. Over.”*

Now, Steve thought he had lost the boy. It took him too long, so long that Steve gave up. He left the walkie on his bed and went to bathroom to take a shower. It was only when he was toweling off that he heard the click. There was a long sigh before Dustin spoke.

“I’ll go ***only*** *because I spoke to everyone and they think I need to at least figure out what she’s after. Over.”*

Steve sighed. “She’s only interested in getting to know you. She’s not after anything. Over.”

“Yeah. We’ll see. Over and out.”

Steve dropped down on the bed, not caring that his wet hair would damp the pillow. So Dustin accepted it. Begrudgingly so, but he said yes. That was something.

“I ordered fries and milkshakes,” she said, giving Steve a pointed a look. He smiled as he sat down in front of her, Dustin plopping down right next to him. “I told her we’d order the rest once you guys got here.”

(Y/N) was screaming internally. This was going bad, not good, total shit. Shit. She tried too hard, that was what she got when she tried too hard, just a whole lot of heartbreak and rejection. Dustin had already said he didn’t want to be there and it took not ten minutes of them together in the car before Steve had to ask for some private time to have a conversation with the boy. She wondered how many more times he’d have to do that before that disastrous night ended.

It was because he was a kid, she knew that. When meeting her parents, she hadn’t been this desperate. Hell, (Y/N) was the opposite, going out of her way to be an asshole, a generally unpleasant person, because she felt she was entitled to at least that. But he looked sweet,

a genuinely nice kid. His childish smile, the curly hair, he resembled her foster little brothers way too much for her to ignore that annoying feeling she rarely got. That need to make people like her.

(Y/N) tried ignoring the silence that came before the waitress arrived and the one that followed right after she left. (Y/N) tried ignoring how Dustin would stare at her, not looking anywhere else. (Y/N) tried ignoring the look on Steve's face, the one that said 'Go ahead, say something.' But after a while, it became too much.

"I can't do this."

"(Y/N)…" Steve pleaded.

"No, look. I-Um-Thank you, Steve. Really, for trying to help out." (Y/N) bit her lips. "But I can't do this to him. I-I'm sorry, Dustin. I really am. As soon as I found out you-" She took a deep breath and could see that Dustin's eyebrows furrowed and his face softened a bit. "When I discovered she'd had another kid, I turned around. I was on my way to Hawkins and I was making phone calls, trying to find out where she lived and someone said your name and I just-" (Y/N) scratched her head. "I drove back. I didn't know where exactly was back because I wasn't coming from anywhere, I haven't had anywhere to come back to in, well, all my life. But I knew-I just knew I couldn't come here. You don't deserve this, honestly. No one does, and it was-"

(Y/N) was being honest, she really was. Her anxiety had gotten the best of her, so she gave up. There was no point, right? At least she knew who her mother was, her mother knew who she was. And that was that. No happy endings for her, but she never really expected one. She hadn't had a very happy start, so why assume the ending would be any different? But the reason (Y/N) stopped talking was because she heard Dustin say something, but he had basically whispered it and she didn't understand him.

"What?"

"… You don't deserve this either," He'd said, now staring anywhere *but* her face. She took a quick glance at Steve, who shrugged very lightly and gave her an encouraging smile.

(Y/N) scoffed. “Yeah, well.” There was another moment of silence, but this one didn’t absolutely destroy her. This one actually felt good. “I’ve been trying to learn to deal with that shit. I’m not doing the best job, I think? But I’m trying.”

“It could be worse, I guess. You could be beating the crap out of Steve’s face or trying to run me and my friends over.” Dustin said, shrugging. Steve gave the boy a stern look.

“What?” (Y/N) laughed, confused. “Why on Earth would I do either of those things?”

“Don’t mind him.” Steve rolled his eyes.

“Well, maybe the beating the shit out of Steve’s face. I could do that. It’s not like I haven’t thought about it.” At her comment, Dustin snorted.

“Hey!” Steve complained.

“C’mon, man. You just have that face, y’know?”

“Like you’re begging to be punched.” Dustin completed, looking at him.

“Exactly!,” (Y/N) exclaimed. “Just begging.”

The two laughed at Steve’s contorted face, and he rolled his eyes. A common enemy, of course. How come he hadn’t thought about that? He would be the two siblings' common enemy for now, let them make fun of him for a while.

The waitress arrived at their table and Dustin noticed when (Y/N) took her fries and dunk them in her chocolate milkshake. He just stared slack-jawed as the girl kept making fun of Steve and his face. When Dustin did the same with his fries, (Y/N) looked at him and smiled, mouthful of fries, giving him a wink.

"You know, I went to the arcade yesterday and it seemed really cool. But there was a creepy dude working there. He kept following me around, eating Funyons, I think?”

“Cheesy puffs.” Both boys corrected her and she smiled.

“Cheesy puffs, yeah. So I didn’t stay long. But I got some money today and I was thinking maybe after this, we can go to the arcade? I didn't really get to play any of the games there the first time around.” She raised her eyebrows and Dustin gave her the tiniest bit of smiles. But it was something.

“Yeah, okay,” Dustin said, shrugging his shoulders. He looked at Steve. “You coming?”

“Sure, buddy.” He winked at Dustin and smiled at (Y/N). “I’d love to see her completely destroy you at Dig Dug.”

“Hey!” The boy touched his chest, pretending to be offended.

“I don’t have to. Didn’t this girl, Max, already did that?” (Y/N) smirked.

“Okay, that’s it. I’m not gonna stand here and have my reputation be questioned like this!” Dustin complained, but he didn’t move. Instead, he ordered a burger from the waitress and kept eating his fries. (Y/N) laughed hard and complained that he was still eating after the large meal Claudia had prepared for them, to which the boy replied that he was about to play at the arcade, so he needed to carbo-load. Meanwhile, Steve watched the back and forth between the two, happy that his plan was working.

“Maybe I’ll be the one to destroy the both of you.” Steve said, his voice dripping with mischief. (Y/N) and Dustin looked at him, then at each other, and had a laughter fit.

The younger boy gave Steve a small slap in the back. “Oh, buddy. That’s the funniest thing you’ve ever said. You wish.”

6. Part VI

It had all been too civil.

In the pursuit of her family, (Y/N) had been laughed at, chased at, and at one point she even had a gun pointed to her head. Sure, that last one happened with one of the man that had helped (Y/N)'s aunt relocate her, and he thought the girl's insistent knocking was because of a pending debt to some loan sharks, but still. It happened.

So it wasn't really surprising to her that she found herself out of breath after screaming at her weeping mother. Both stood awkwardly in the living room, and a few tears threatened to stream down (Y/N)'s face, but she wiped them off quickly. She looked around and took a deep breath, her lips quivering.

(Y/N) blamed Steve for this.

This is what had happened.

After eating at the diner, they did go to the arcade, and had a fun time. It was awkward at first, and there were a few setbacks here and there, but (Y/N) was surprised to see that they were actually hanging out just fine. She helped Dustin break Max's record and didn't miss the slightly nervous look on his face that was quickly replaced by joy, but said nothing. And Steve was so helpless, he couldn't even play Galaga ("I'm not a video game guy, I'm more of an action dude", to which she replied "You're killing enemy aliens arriving in formation trying to capture your spaceship. It doesn't get more *action* than this". That was a pivotal moment for Dustin, by the way, who liked her even more now). Afterwards, Steve dropped Dustin at his house, and they said their goodbyes. The boy had actually said "I'll see you" to (Y/N), which was a good thing. She should invite him to spend time with her at the bookstore. Maybe next time.

"So…," Steve began, trying to fill the silence in the car. He had insisted on driving (Y/N) to her motel so she wouldn't walk around alone at night. After much discussing, she'd reluctantly agreed. "That

was… fun, right?”

(Y/N) let herself smile a bit. “Yeah, it was alright.”

“C'mon, (Y/N)! It was rocky at first, I’ll admit it. But he’s starting to like you.”

“You think so?”

“I know so,” he assured her, looking at the girl next to him for a second before turning back to the street. “Specially when you kept making fun of me.”

“That was fun for the both of us,“ she laughed. Steve huffed. "You’re not really upset.”

“Nah. You two are bonding, and Dustin’s not mad at me anymore which is… A good thing. I can tell I’ll probably get home and he’s gonna annoy the shit out of me with the walkie, but I won’t complain. For now.” Steve joked and she laughed quietly, letting the silence take over again. “Did you really want to punch me?”

“Yeah,” She said, matter-of-factly. At his feigned surprised, (Y/N) rolled her eyes. “The first time I saw you, you were watching me and judging-”

“I was not!”

“You were! You were just standing there, thinking you’re so cool,” she began, flailing her arms and making fun of him once more. “Your arms crossed, all serious, with that cool hair. Not saying anything. You were like, trying to figure me out. Which I get, but it doesn’t mean that I liked it.”

“… You think my hair is cool?” Steve grinned, wiggling his eyebrows at her. (Y/N) shot him an exasperated glance and rolled her eyes, but didn’t say anything.

Part of the reason she was reluctant to agree to that ride was because he made her uncomfortable. That hadn’t happen a lot of times in (Y/N)’s life. For the most part, she had to fend for herself, be independent. She couldn’t let people dictate how she felt all the time,

she didn't take shit from anyone. So whenever someone made her feel uncomfortable, or less than, she'd just call them out on it, pick a fight or just leave. But this was a different kind of uncomfortable.

It didn't take too long for them to reach her motel, which was a relief. It was becoming hard to breathe inside that car. But right as she turned to the back seat to pick up her duffle bag, Steve spoke.

"Do you, um…," he began as soon as he parked on the parking lot, looking around at the rooms in front of them, and she could tell he was nervous. "I don't know how to ask you this without sounding like an ass."

"Maybe don't ask, then." (Y/N) said, feeling weird. Scared. What was he gonna ask?

"Ugh, just." He rubbed his face. "This is not a nice motel. I mean, isn't it dirty and kind of gross?"

(Y/N) sighed, relieved. She could handle *that* questioning. "Yeah. But it's my best option."

"Don't you think Ms. Henderson would-"

"She already offered," (Y/N) interrupted Steve, giving him a pointed look. "It's probably not the best idea, with Dustin and everything."

"Yeah, but-"

"What's going on, man?," she asked, her forehead wrinkling. "You know that I can't push him, that I have to take this slow so that he doesn't have such a hard time accepting that I… exist." (Y/N) made a face.

"That was before I saw this dump you've been staying at *for more than a week*." He was concerned, that's what that was. As soon as he entered the parking lot of the motel, Steve made a grossed-out face. It's not like he didn't know about the motel, but actually seeing it made him get the creeps. "Don't you get scared or whatever?"

(Y/N) scoffed. "This is just a small town. What would I have to be scared of?" *Demogorgons. People with telekinesis power. Creepy-ass lab*

experiments.

“I don’t know,” Steve shrugged, ignoring his thoughts. “But it doesn’t feel… safe.”

“Steve, I can’t exactly rent a place. I don’t have the money, and I didn’t-don’t plan on staying here for too long. Dustin’s house is out of the question. I didn’t know anyone in town, so it’s not like I could crash at someone’s couch.”

“You know me,” Steve quickly added, trying like hell to ignore the gnawing feeling in his chest. The restlessness. “I live in a big house. A lot of guest rooms. Plus, there’s a pool house. You could stay there if you wanted.”

“I don’t know you,” (Y/N) stated simply. “You’re just some guy trying to help me become friends with my estranged mother and half-brother. Which, granted, is a lot. But I don’t really *know* you.” She felt weird having to explain that to him. Why on Earth would he invite her to his house when they didn’t really know each other? Unless… No, she would ignore the thought that popped in her head. Steve had all the looks of the guys who would actually invite her to his place just for sex, but he didn’t have the personality. Not from what she had witnessed. “Also, wouldn’t your parents think it odd that there’s a girl staying at their house?”

Steve scoffed and looked down at his hands, fiddling with his fingers. He *was* just *some guy* helping her. She was right. Why was he so upset at her words?

“My parents travel around a lot. Plus, even when they’re here, they’re not *here*. Not very present people, my folks. Remote, I’d call them.” Steve joked, but she could sense the hurt in his words. That was probably why he was friends with Dustin, why her mother had gushed at Steve when they had discussed his friendship with Dustin. Was he looking for a family? Like she was?

“Steve,” She said, after a while. “I appreciate the offer, but I’m fine. It’s fine. I’m not gonna stay in this dump for long, just until I settle things with my family, and then…" (Y/N) bit the inside of her lip and turned around to get her duffle bag.

"And then…?" Steve encouraged her to finish the sentence, even though he was sure the end of it would upset him.

“Then I’ll leave, go on my way? I don’t know yet." (Y/N) looked at him, and she could see the wheels turning in his mind, but ignored it. "Good night, Steve."

Steve kept looking at her long after she’d shut his door. He saw her reach for the keys to the room in the front pocket of the bag, he saw her open her door and enter, but what he heard after she walked in her room was a scream. Steve quickly made his way out of his car, hearing (Y/N) yell out a "Get the fuck out of here!”, but didn’t manage to walk two steps before he saw a half-naked man run from her room, holding the pieces of clothing he wasn’t wearing. Steve furrowed his brows and finally reached her room, seeing (Y/N) rub her eyes.

“What the hell was that?,” he exclaimed. (Y/N) let out a yelp.

“Fuck! Steve! Don’t creep up on a girl like that.”

“You mean, like that dude? (Y/N), what was that?”

“How the fuck would I know? Never seen him before." (Y/N) sighed, looking around her room, disgusted. There’s was no way she was gonna stay there, not after she walked in on that creep lying half-naked on the bed she had been sleeping. She thought maybe she had seen him before, one of the maintenance workers at the motel. "Shit…”

“Okay, this fucking settles it, right? Let’s go pay what you owe and then, we’re going back to my house. Okay?” Steve asked, his facial features soft and concerned. (Y/N) thought she might throw up.

She sighed. “Okay.”

The ride back to his place had been mostly silent, except when Steve made fun of (Y/N), his voice going up an octave, saying *“This is just a small town. What would I have to be scared of?”*. (Y/N) snorted and slapped him in the arm. But other than that, they were both silent.

Steve was a mess. Sure, he didn’t know her, and he was bringing a

stranger into his home, and he wasn't *sure* she wouldn't steal him, or kill him in his sleep. He was *almost* positive she wouldn't, but, y'know. Although that wasn't his main concern. He wasn't even sure what was making him so nervous. He had brought girls to his house before. Well, it was a different situation. Very different. And yet, he couldn't help but wonder if that wasn't the very thing (Y/N) was thinking about. She'd just been creeped out by some random dude, maybe she was thinking that Steve would do the same? Play nice, be polite, help her out and then… No, he wouldn't. He knew he wouldn't. Did she?

(Y/N)'s mind, on the other hand, was going a million miles per hour. What was she doing? Why did she agree to this? Sure, a creepy dude showed up and she had no idea how he entered her room, but she could've gotten another room. Well, that was a stupid idea, if that guy managed to get inside one room, who could say he wouldn't do it with another one? But also, who could say going to Steve's house was a better idea? At least the motel was in a more central part of the town. His house, (Y/N) soon realized when he pulled into his driveway, was a more secluded place. Okay, so she was *almost* sure he wouldn't try anything, but "almost sure" isn't good enough, and she had been wrong about people before, so.

"We're here." Steve smiled, turned the keys in the ignition.

(Y/N) took a deep breath and followed him, as he entered the house and showed her around. She was *astounded*. The house was enormous, she couldn't possibly be expected to believe only three people lived there. Steve showed her to the kitchen, and she accepted a glass of water.

"There are guest rooms down here, but you can also stay in the pool house, if you'd like." Steve offered.

"Um, yeah. I think-yeah. It might be best if I stay in the pool house." She nervously said.

"Thought so." Steve bit his lips, nervous. It would make her feel less nervous about all of this, he thought, if she was at least further away from him. On her own, instead of in the same house as his. He took her to the pool house and left her there, going back to the main

house for blankets and a towel.

(Y/N) plopped down on the bed, looking around. This was significantly better than her motel room, and it smelled better too, a scent of pine and lavender filling the entire place. And the bathroom, holy crap, the bathroom. It was squeaky clean, the rose-shaped soaps on top of the shining white porcelain acting more of a decorative feature than something you should actually use. She wouldn't dare touch those soaps.

She took a sip of the water, sighed again and stood up, doing the same routine she'd done every day at the motel. The folded clothes went in the dresser, the toiletries were arranged on the bathroom sink, and the books were placed at the bedside table. (Y/N) put the duffle bag in a chair as Steve made his way back.

"So, here are some things you might need." He put the towel and blankets on top of the bed, and looked at the girl, seeing her give him a small smile. They didn't say anything while Steve looked around and saw her books, and a few photographs sticking out of them. "Oh, cool, you have-"

"Don't!" (Y/N) had ran in his direction, stopping in front of him and taking from his hands Joan Didion's The White Album. Steve eyes went wide, her sudden movements catching him off guard. And then they stayed wide because of the proximity between the two.

Steve knew at that moment he wouldn't be able to sleep that night.

He'd never been this close to (Y/N) before and he could see every detail in her face, her soulful eyes, her flushed cheeks, the soft edges of her lips. Her eyes were filled with worry, and her eyebrows just a little bit furrowed. (Y/N) was out of breath and she was standing so close that her breathing was hitting him right on the part of his chest his shirt didn't cover, and that did it for him.

He liked her.

He *liked* her.

'Fuck.'

"These are…," her word cut through the silence, as she looked at the book in her hands. “Personal. I’m sorry I yelled, that was…"

Every part of (Y/N)’s mind was telling her to take a step back. ‘C'mon, (Y/N). *Create some distance*.’ But her body would not obey. There was this warmth coming from him, from all of him. She could feel it a little coming from his body, that was fine, (Y/N) could handle that. But she could also see it in his eyes, and that warmth, radiating from his half-closed lids, was killing her. That, she could not handle. So her body finally caught up and she took a step back, her legs hitting the bed.

Steve had not spoken yet. He didn’t know what to say, mainly because he didn’t want to say anything. He just wanted to kiss her and hold her and goddamn it, why her all of people? Why the stubborn, hot-headed, rude girl?

"Um… I think I better, y'know… Get some sleep," (Y/N) spoke softly, gesturing at the bed behind her and giving him a tight-lipped smile.

"Right!,” Steve practically screamed, he wasn’t able to modulate his voice anymore. All of it, how to speak, what words to use, forgotten. (Y/N) jumped a bit at his words, and he sighed. “Sorry, uh- Yeah, yeah. I’m gonna go too. Sorry about the…,” he pointed at the book in her hands and saw that she was gripping with a lot more force than necessary.

“It’s fine.”

There was a moment of silence where Steve’s feet were glued to the carpet.

“Um, good night, (Y/N),” he said, still.

“Good night, Steve. Thanks for letting me stay.”

Steve bit his lips and scratched his neck, making his way to the door. Before he shut it, he mumbled a “No problem.” without looking at her. (Y/N) plopped down on the bed again and took a deep breath. It felt like she hadn’t breathed in a really long time.

(Y/N) tried to understand what had just happened and she couldn’t,

for the life of her, figure it out. She knew what attraction felt like, obviously. She'd felt a few times in her life, and acted on it too. But for some reason, this felt more than that. More than-

'No. Deny it. Bury it. Ignore it. Whatever you have to do, don't think about it,' she thought, throwing the book aside and diving her head in the pillow. (Y/N) stood up, took a shower, changed into a baggy t-shirt, and tucked herself inside the covers, her mind racing too much to fall asleep, so she opened the very book Steve had grabbed and read the first sentence.

"We tell ourselves stories in order to live."

So (Y/N) hadn't slept at all the night before, not a wink.

She had tossed and turned and at one point, it was close to 3 am., she went to the window and noticed that the light was on on the bedroom looking out the pool. (Y/N) sighed and went back to bed.

Her anxiety was at an all-time high, she was tired and honestly, she just wanted to scream all of these feelings away. Feelings of inadequacy, of abandonment, of whatever it was that stupid thing in the pit of the stomach whenever she looked at Steve's stupid face.

When she'd called Claudia in the morning, as promised, and her mother told her to visit her that day, she embraced that opportunity with open arms. All of those feelings had been replaced by anger, and though she was sure she'd regret it later, (Y/N) knew exactly what she was going to do now that some time had passed and she was gonna talk to Claudia alone, without Dustin. The boy was a major inconvenience and everything about him threw her off her game, but now he was at school… Now, Claudia was going to listen to everything she had to say.

So she arrived at the Henderson house, duffle bag on her shoulders, and Claudia answered the door cheerily, cleaning her hands on her apron. She gave the girl some room to enter and (Y/N) let the bag fall on the floor as soon as she went inside. Claudia jumped from the noise it made and looked at her daughter. She could see it, the anger

in her eyes.

“So, (Y/N)… I’m actually making lunch right now, nothing too fancy, just-”

“What happened?" (Y/N) asked, through gritted teeth.

"What happened? I don’t understand, I-”

“Why… would you… throw me out?!" (Y/N)’s voice was louder now. "Like trash?! Is that what I am to you? Just something you can *get rid of*?”

It came to her, right then. As it always did when she always feeling down, as it always did when she’d let it. The rush of thoughts, each carrying its own unbearable weight.

Abandoned as a baby.

Never adopted.

Went from foster home to foster home, and she used the word “home” loosely.

Never truly made friends.

Never had a family.

I had a family, she had to remember herself after the last one. *I have a family, but they hate me, they chose not to be here, they don’t want me. They’ve never even met me and they already know I’m no good. I’m damaged and I don’t deserve a family. That’s why they’re not here. Because I don’t deserve them.*

“What? No! I never wanted to get rid of you, never. I loved you-I love you, sweetie.” Claudia croaked, tears prickling in her eyes, and gulped.

“Don’t call me sweetie! You have no right to call me sweetie." (Y/N)’s tone was heartbreaking.

"I was so happy when you showed up here, (Y/N), I-so, so happy. You

have no idea.” Claudia sobbed. “I finally, *finally*-after 17 years, I was finally able to sleep at night. You have never once, not for a day, left my thoughts. When I would tuck Dustin in for the night when he was little, I would think about you and who was tucking you in-"”

"No one, that’s who was tucking me in." (Y/N) barked, avoiding her mother’s eyes.

Claudia sighed. "When Dustin was sick, I would think about you, and whether you were healthy. When he had friends over, I’d think what it would be like to have a bunch of little girls for a sleepover. When he does his homework in the kitchen, I always, *always* picture two people doing their homework in the kitchen. You’re always there, you’re always in my mind. And when you came here, I… For the first time, I knew where you were, and I was just-I *am* happy.”

“That makes one of us." (Y/N) hissed.

She blamed Steve for this. If he hadn’t shown up, things would’ve turn out differently. If he hadn’t offered his place, she would’ve been able to sleep at night and she wouldn’t be a mess, like she was. Maybe she would’ve been more calm and collected, like she was when she’d met her dad. Okay, maybe she wasn’t. (Y/N) had been ready to yell at him for abandoning her, but the fact he didn’t even know she existed made her stop. And the grudge she held towards her mother got even bigger.

And it was in that moment of silence that they heard the keys in the door.

Dustin walked in with a smile on his face, and he even smiled larger when he’d seen (Y/N). She would not forget that. But it took him a split second to see that something was wrong. His mother was crying, weeping. The woman who took care of him when he was sick, the mostly aloof but definitely loving woman, his *mother*. He knew this had been a mistake, this girl. Right when he was starting to warm up to her. But now, she was making his mother cry. He would not accept that.

"Dustin, what are you-" (Y/N) started, but was quickly interrupted.

"Get out.” Dustin fumed.

“Dustin…”

“Get the fuck out of my house! I don’t want to see you here, you don’t belong here!”